

**Department of Human Services
Office of Rehabilitation Services
State Rehabilitation Council**

Meeting Minutes November 19, 2007

4:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M.

Present from State Rehabilitation Council: Janice Belasco, Dr. Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Raymond Carroll, Linda L. Deschenes, Domenic DiOrio Jr., Susan Donavon, Dr. Judith L. Drew, Jeanne M. Giroux, Micheal Hazard, Margaret Hoye, Anne LeClerc, Gary J. Levine, J. David Sienko, Vincent Rossi, Juan Troncoso, Mary E. Wambach

Present from Agency: Stephen Brunero, Ronald Racine, Laurie DiOrio

Guests: Kelley Conti,

1. Call to Order and Introductions - The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

1. Additions or deletions to the Agenda – none.

2. Approval of Minutes

Motion

M. Wambach made a motion seconded by J. Belasco and unanimously accepted, to approve the minutes from the October 15, 2007 meeting.

2. Old business – D. Sienko

1. Annual Report: The Chair thanked everyone for getting everything done. It's a pleasure to work with a group that has goals and proceeds in a timely way and follow-up on things. The fact that we are able to write these committee reports, and be so focused, shows that the strategic planning has worked. It's a good structure that we have put in place. We are targeted and getting things accomplished. This is the earliest our report has been done.

2. Providence Journal Letter: The Chair has asked H. Weiss to help do this and there has not been any follow-through. At the last executive committee meeting R. Carroll had some suggestions and sent the materials to the Chair. The Chair will work on this with the help of others.

3. New Business

Nominations and Leadership Committee

D. DiOrio Jr. - presented the names for the Slate of Officers for the Council membership to vote on.

J. David Sienko for Chair, Joseph Ferreira for Vice-Chair, and Catherine Sansonetti for Secretary

He asked if there were any other names to be placed for nominations in accordance to Robert's Rules, there were none.

Motion

D. DiOrio made a motion that was seconded by S. Donovan and unanimously appointed with one abstention from D. Sienko, to accept the Slate of Officers.

The Chair thanked everyone for the faith in the Officer's abilities. He complimented both the Vice chair and Secretary for their hard work and dedication to the Council's mission.

D. DiOrio said that the Council's success has been due to D. Sienko's leadership and on behalf of the entire Council membership he thanked the Chair for his clear thinking and tireless efforts to work with ORS in achieving the best outcomes possible.

Committee Work

The committees caucused for twenty-five (25) minutes before presenting updates to their Strategic Plans.

Employment – S. Donovan

We are working on a Marketing Plan including furthering outreach to the Rhode Island Business community through all the Chamber of Commerce and the RI Business Leadership Network. Additionally, an article slated for a press release, detailing the benefits of the Office of Rehabilitation Services (VR Agency) as a qualified labor resource had been finalized, along with a strategy for its dissemination.

Update

We follow up with one of the RI Businesses that the Agency has worked with to get a blurb from them.

We contacted an employer that was honored at last year's Employer Honor Role and we are working on getting our press release out.

Nominations and Leadership – D. DiOrio Jr.

We have successfully addressed the guidelines for the Federal Legislations as well as the needs of the Office of Rehabilitation Services to meet and expand upon the requirements for the composition of our membership. For the next calendar year, the committee recommended six (6) new members to be seated on the Council, all representing minority and disabled populations in our state. Additionally, there are plans to seek even greater business and

industry representation on the Council; actuate our Guest Speaker Program in order to better educate the membership on specific issues dealing with Vocational Rehabilitation programs operating in our state,

Update

Internal In-Service Guest Speaker Program will start at the next meeting. We have people on our Council to speak to us regarding helping our population get employment.

Small Business Association - Expand our reach further into the corporate world. Develop a flowchart to determine if there are repetitions in services that could be combined for more efficiency.

Transportation – J. Drew

We are in the middle of its survey. The goal of the survey is to identify barriers to transportation access and to learn what transportation resources are being provided to citizens with disabilities from the organizations and non-profits that have been identified. Once the data is collected, it will be analyzed and utilized to provide the SRC and RIPTA with feedback on what our major barriers are, and what transportation resources may be available through private collaboration that could be allocated more efficiently.

Update

We have developed 209 agencies that will be surveyed. Once the returned data has come, we will follow-up the next week by phone to whoever has not responded. We anticipate by the February meeting to have our results.

Then we will start to take a look at what we need to do to change the transportation situation in our state.

State Plan and Policy and Quality Assurance Committee – Kate McCarthy-Barnett

In the past year, a timeline was developed for the review of the State Plan. As the State Plan guides the work of ORS for each year, it is a critical document that requires thoughtful feedback from the SRC. A designated ORS staff person has been selected to help the committee with new goals for the upcoming year. In addition, last year the committee examined eight (8) proposed Agency policy revisions and gave feedback and advice to the Agency about the proposed changes as well as about the impact the changes might have on consumers.

Update

It was tough for us to do specific action steps. Our next step is to work with K. Grygiel (ORS Liaison) to align the data for the Needs Assessment and Quality Assurance to get a better understanding of what we need to address for the upcoming Plan.

One of the things we are looking closely at is the underserved populations.

ORS Administrator's Report: R. Carroll

Implementation of the Governor's Workforce Reduction Plan is being brought to play in three ways; existing fill positions, open positions, and contractors. It's been an ad hoc effort with very little information for staff and this is not good because we want to keep our people educated.

We learned that some of the readers and the drivers for the blind and visually impaired had been given their notices. There were other cuts as well but the specifics of those were not discussed. Two Fridays ago the unions had started to call individuals letting them know they were being laid off. There has been high anxiety as people try to ascertain how this will affect them and the organization. But with the bumping processes we really don't know who will eventually be dismissed. We could get an untrained individual that bumps one of our trained people out of a job.

The Rehabilitation Act has regulations for what our counselors can and cannot do. But it is important for us to educate the leadership or our Department, which is very thin in terms of institutional knowledge

due to a loss of people in the last few years in upper management. We cannot express strongly enough that this is human services and it requires trained personnel to do the work.

We are trying to maintain our core services and use our resources in the best way. In the past we have handled shortages but now it is getting to point of doing only what they should be doing, because of the lack of resources, and we are worried about overworking, stress, and negativity.

Retirement – R. Carroll announced to the Council his retirement by telling them that he has worked so long because of love of the values of the people who have worked with him and those that they serve.

The Chair, on behalf of the Council thanked him and told him that he was happy for him personally but also disappointed to lose such a tireless advocate for the Agency. The Council will, through the executive committee, ask for his continued support as things move forward and emerge.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the cutbacks and the affects they will bring to the ability of ORS to continue to serve its customers in a timely and productive manner. They spoke about strategies to prevent further cuts and expressed concerns over the ones that had been made. It was generally agreed upon that further advocacy for the Agency was, and will be needed as more of the

economic realities of the State's fiscal situation develop. The membership agreed upon a motion.

Motion

M. Wambach made a motion seconded by J. Drew and unanimously approved to allow the executive leadership to take action whenever needed in a timely manner for advocacy of the Agency.

5. Public Comment – Kelley Conti

She became visually impaired six (6) years ago and wanted to express her appreciation to ORS for how much they have helped her. She is working again in a new job at EDS and is planning to attend college. She has had some difficulties with Johnson and Whales and CCRI, where she is currently enrolled, meeting her needs as a visually impaired student. She would like the Council's assistance for the betterment of all students.

The Chair wants to get further information regarding this. He asked Kelly to contact him so they can speak further. Maybe there is a roll for us here. This may be a systemic issue.

6. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy L. Baker, Staff
State Rehabilitation Council